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ABSTRACT

Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad is an analytical device intended to be used by critics to discover the roots of motivation for particular acts. The five elements of the pentad are the scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose. Using the Burkean Pentad, this symposium presents the following five analyses of Watergate: "Scenic Responsibility: the Relinquishment of Autonomy and the Retention of Innocence"; "The Act of Watergate"; "Nixon, Watergate, and the Rhetoric of Agent"; "Richard M. Nixon: The Fascination with Agency"; and "Richard M. Nixon and the Rhetorical Purpose." For each analysis, the critic was arbitrarily assigned a term from the Pentad and asked to explore the Watergate publications and news materials from the perspective offered by the term. The goal of the symposium was to explain the motivation of Nixon and those who responded to him during the months leading to his resignation. (HAI)

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## SYMPOSIUM: A PENTADIC ANALYSIS OF RICHARD NIXON AND WATERGATE

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Speaker and Gavel

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# A PENTADIC ANALYSIS OF RICHARD NIXON AND WATERGATE

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Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad is an analytical device which is intended to be used by critics to discover the roots of motivation for particular acts. Since Burke's publication of his system of analysis in *A Grammar of Motives* scholars from a variety of disciplines have applied the pentad to various human actions, such as those depicted in literature, politics, interpersonal interactions, and public communications. The five elements of the pentad are:

1. *The Scene*—when or where the act was done;
2. *The Act*—what was done;
3. *The Agent*—who did the act;
4. *The Agency*—how the act was done or with what tools or devices or techniques; and
5. *The Purpose*—the reason why the act was done.[1]

These five elements allow the critic to organize the often confusing and subtle nuances which usually surround human action and give a perspective from which to view each of the separate elements (e.g., the kind of act called for in a given scene or the kind of agent appropriate for a given act). The system further can be used to identify a particular person or organization's "Key Term" or philosophy of motivation or action. For example, the advertiser who claims the superiority of "Zenith's new Color Sentry Control" for achieving accurate color reception in television is choosing to emphasize

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Charles U. Larson provided the introduction and revised the presentations to fit the space limitations of the Journal.

[1] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. xix.

[2] F.C.B. of Chicago is the producer of a 30 second T.V. spot entitled "Fiddler" which makes such claims for the Zenith technique (spot number T6051C, June, 1976).

agency or tool or technique. Since the advertiser presumably thinks this will motivate others as well, the advertiser's theory or philosophy of motivation is seen.

No other set of political actions in recent times has attracted as much interest as has the Watergate scandal. In spite of a number of analyses of the event, there is still much confusion as to the motivations of the various characters involved in the event. The recent Nixon-Frost interviews and revelations by key actors in the affair promise to continue the attention and probably add to the confusion. What follows is a set of five short analyses of various elements in Watergate using the Burkean dramatistic method. Each of the critics was arbitrarily assigned one of the terms of the pentad and was instructed to explore Watergate publications and speeches/interviews/news conferences and other materials. The goal was to use the term to help explain what it was that motivated not only Nixon but also those who responded to him and for him throughout the months leading up to resignation. Although the critics sometimes disagree with one another, the symposium taken as a whole sheds some light on potential explanations for the motives of the central characters in Watergate. Watergate seemed to be a drama complete with heroes, villains, plots and subplots and the pentad serves to highlight that drama. Each of the terms forces investigation of a new set of relationships between source, message and audience. As Burke puts it: "From the central moltenness, where all the elements are fused into one togetherness, there are thrown forth in separate crusts, such distinctions as those between freedom and necessity, activity and passiveness, cooperation and competition, cause and effect, mechanism and teleology."[3]

## SCENIC RESPONSIBILITY: THE RELINQUISHMENT OF AUTONOMY AND THE RETENTION OF INNOCENCE

Richard E. Crable

Richard Nixon's first Inaugural made clear his desire to lead a unified country into what he later called a "second American revolution." Acting upon the mandate of the *new majority*, Nixon's impoundment of funds, his veto judgements, and his global diplomacy created the image of a man of action and a leader of strong will, a man who boasted of his leadership and tenacity in his December 1972 bombing of North Vietnam: "I still went ahead and did what I thought was right."[4]

Interestingly, Richard Nixon's public explanations concerning Watergate create a nearly opposite image. In persuasive strategies generated for the mass media, he tried to create a *reality* for Americans which would include a belief in his innocence. These public messages do not show a leader using great ideas to mold a better nation or to rejuvenate Bi-Centennial America.

[3] Burke, p. xix.

[4] "Transcript of President Nixon's New Conference on Domestic and Foreign Affairs," *New York Times*, 27 Oct. 1973, p. 14.

Instead, he attempted to create the reality of a man who could not manipulate the scene around him because he was a victim of the events that constituted his scene. He was a man reacting passively, fatalistically, and, thus, innocently to his environment. Nixon's chief rationale for his Watergate innocence throughout the scandal was that his actions were dictated by the events around him. His *responsibility* to these events, ironically, was why he could not be held *responsible* for any Watergate wrong-doing. This strategy was used to justify pre-Watergate activities, the early lack of investigation, and the struggles with the special prosecutors and the courts.

On May 22, 1973, for example, Richard Nixon presented his most simplistic rationale for the wire-tapping practice as a method of stopping leaks. Diplomatic initiatives would fail unless leaks could be prevented, he claimed. "This required finding the source of the leaks."[5] Nixon, thus, defended wire-tapping as a response that was simply required by the situation in 1969. Similarly, the 1971 creation of the "plumbers unit" was presented as a decision forced by the demands of the time. Against the background of "delicate negotiations" with regard to Vietnam, China, or the Middle-East, Nixon contended that leaks were so potentially disastrous that the threat of one was "so grave as to require extraordinary actions."[6] Again, the act was controlled by the scene and out of the control of the agent.

As the Watergate investigation turned up myriad details of White House involvement, Nixon explained his earlier lack of fervor in the investigation. He attempted to avoid blame for inaction by blaming misleading assurances by trusted sources: "Because I trusted the agencies conducting the investigations, because I believed the reports I was getting, I did not believe the newspaper accounts which suggested a cover-up, because I was convinced that no one had anything to cover up."[7] Throughout the investigation, Nixon claimed that reports by the FBI,[8] Attorney General Kleindienst, John Dean, and John Ehrlichman[9] all indicated that no one in the White House except the original seven was guilty of wrong-doing. With such a scene, Nixon seems to ask, how can I be blamed for not pursuing the investigation?

Later Nixon tried to justify certain actions which delayed the proceedings of the special prosecutor. Here he pictured himself again as a man molded by the scene. After Richardson's resignation, Nixon wrote a letter (later published) to Acting Attorney General Bork explaining his choice to dismiss Cox. "Clearly, the Government of the United States cannot function if employees of the executive branch are free to ignore in this fashion the instructions of the President of the United States."[10] A week after the "Saturday night massacre," Nixon again defended his dismissal of Cox as a necessity caused by Cox's failure to abide by the compromise agreed to by Richardson, Ervin, and others. "I had no choice but to dismiss him."[11]

While defending actions which seemed to impede the special prosecutor, Nixon also tried to justify his delay in turning over tapes, testimony, and

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[5] "Text of Statement by the President on Allegations Surrounding Watergate Inquiry," *New York Times*, 27 Oct. 1973, p. 14.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Transcript of President's Speech to the Nation in Answer to Watergate Inquiry," *New York Times*, 27 Oct. 1973, p. 14.

[8] "Text of Nixon's Statement on Watergate Scandal as Issued by the White House," *New York Times*, 16 Aug. 1973, p. 25.

[9] "Speech in Answer to Watergate Charges," p. 24.

[10] "Ziegler Statement and Texts of Letters," *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 1973, p. 61.

[11] "News Conference on Domestic and Foreign Affairs," p. 14.

documents to the courts.[12] Again, his strategy was to claim that he was the victim of his responsibilities. Disclosure of some of the plumbers unit activity would "unquestionably damage the national security."[13] Nixon said his responsibility to scenic constraints dictated his witholding actions. Although he said he was willing to disclose some tapes, "We have a problem there." He warned that they affected "the rights of the defendants and also the possibility of prosecution, and under the circumstances, of course, we must be, to a certain extent, guided by that."[14] But if these justifications were not enough to warrant the witholding of tapes and documents, there was one more controlling scenic factor: the balance of governmental power. Claiming that the executive "must be immune from unlimited search and seizure by the other co-equal branches,"[15] he pledged that "I am prepared to cooperate with the committee in any way consistent with my constitutional responsibility to defend the office of the Presidency."[16]

The allusion to scene is pervasive in Nixon's public justifications. The strategies demonstrate that he was willing to relinquish the image of a man in control of his fate in order to retain the image of a man innocent because he had no choice. Although Nixon had said of his aides "I accept full responsibility for them,"[17] he laid responsibility on the events around him. He said, "the top man always takes the responsibility and I've never ducked it,"[18] but his entire message strategy aimed at ducking responsibility. He said, "I could stand here before this audience and make all kinds of excuses,"[19] and implied he would not; yet his whole strategy was a series of excuses. He created a campaign picturing himself as the unwilling victim of the events around him, but he would not be held accountable for those events.

Even Nixon's final act, the resignation, was claimed to be a yielding to the scene. "To leave office before my term is completed is opposed to every instinct in my body. But as President I must put the interests of America first."[20] In spite of all the evidence he still proclaimed his innocence: guilt was not the reason he resigned, it was a loss of Congressional support that forced him from office.[21] Thus the man who was responsible for the loss of Congressional support cited it as being responsible for the resignation. And the man who opted to relinquish a state of perceived innocence, in the end, gained neither.

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[12] Since some of that material was sought by both the Senate committee and the courts, we shall deal with the tape and document disclosure issue in general.

[13] "Statement on Watergate Scandal as Issued by White House," p. 25.

[14] "Transcript of the President's News Conferences on Domestic and Foreign Affairs," *New York Times*, 7 Mar. 1974, p. 32.

[15] "Text of Letter to Rodino from President Refusing to Furnished Subpoenaed Evidence," *New York Times*, 11 June 1974, p. 30.

[16] "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Domestic and Foreign Affairs," *New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1974, p. 22.

[17] "In Answer to Watergate Charges," p. 24.

[18] "Transcript of Nixon's Farewell Speech to Cabinet and Staff members in the Capital," *New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1974, p. 4.

[19] "Transcript of Nixon's Questions and Answer Session with A.P. Managing Editors," *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1973, p. 62.

[20] "Transcript of President Nixon's Address to the Nation Announcing his Resignation," *New York Times*, 9 Aug. 1974, p. 2.

[21] Ibid.

# THE ACT OF WATERGATE

BERNARD L. BROCK[22]

We were all participants in the drama as Watergate escalated from a caper, to an incident, to a scandal, to a conspiracy, and finally to political warfare. As Watergate's pollution built and guilt was assigned more directly to Richard Nixon, impeachment seemed the only act of purification. Nixon's resignation and pardon made the victimage incomplete, precluding redemption.

This section will not attempt to describe the entire drama but will focus on Watergate as act. The essay argues that act is central to Watergate. It is important to note that the escalation of Watergate was a personal psychological process. For some the act escalated to political warfare immediately. For others it never escalated. This discussion is based upon the national psychological state as reflected in popular newspapers and magazines.

The drama began publicly on June 17, 1972. Five men were discovered inside the Watergate complex. Democratic Party Chairman Larry O'Brien immediately accused the Republicans of "blatant political espionage."[23] John Mitchell, Nixon's campaign manager, responded that "this was sheer demagogery."[24] Press Secretary Ron Ziegler, played down the act saying that it was a "third-rate burglary attempt."[25]

The national media following Ziegler's light tone playfully reported on "The Bugs at the Watergate,"[26] and "Capers: Operation Watergate."[27] Both articles identified with Ziegler's language describing a scene-act ratio in which the act was a caper. "It was just a strip of masking tape, but it is fast stretching into the most provocative caper of 1972. . . ."[28] *Newsweek* treated it more ala Mission Impossible: "They wore surgical gloves and carried walkie-talkies, a pair of cameras and electronic bugging devices."[29] The result was a scenic label for the act: *Watergate*. This scene influenced television newscasts which always opened their coverage with a picture of the Watergate complex.

After the convention, Watergate escalated from a caper to an *incident* with the link to Hunt and Liddy, with CRP and "the plumbers." CRP had given one of the Watergate five $114,000.[30] The escalation resulted in a shift in treatment to an agent-act ratio: *Time* talked about "Watergate, Cont."[31] "The Watergate Issue,"[32] and "The Watergate Rolls On."[33] *Newsweek* in the article "The Spies Who Came in For the Heat" indicated

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[22] An earlier and more extensive version of this essay appeared in *Speaker and Gavel*, 12 (Spring 1975), 64–67.
[23] "The Bugs at Watergate," *Time*, 3 July 1972, p. 10.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Capers: Operation Watergate," *Newsweek*, 3 July 1972, p. 21.
[28] "Bugs at Watergate," p. 10.
[29] Capers, p. 18.
[30] "Watergate Cont.," *Time*, 3 Aug. 1972, p. 21.
[31] Ibid.
[32] *Time*, 28 Aug. 1972, p. 20.
[33] *Time*, 11 Sept. 1972, p. 48.

that "the tangled affair has turned into the political hydra of the Presidential campaign."[34] This was followed by a "Who's Who in the Watergate Affair."[35]

In March 1973, James McCord revealed "that other persons besides those convicted had been involved. Perjury had been committed . . . political pressure had been applied to make the defendants plead guilty."[36] The revelation led to acts which brought more escalation—John Dean's testimony, the televised Senate Watergate Hearings, and the disclosure of the White House taping system. Watergate enveloped both Republican and governmental agencies—CRP, the White House, FBI, CIA, and IRS.

Watergate was now a *scandal* in an agency-act ratio. In "Watergate: The Dam Bursts," *Newsweek* declared, "It was the most damaging scandal to befall the *Presidency* since Teapot Dome—and when it finally cracked open last week, the tremors shook the government to its foundation."[37] The stress on agency was reinforced later when *Newsweek* added that "the CIA the FBI, the Justice and State Departments, even the Marine Corps were tarred by scandal."[38]

The escalation of Watergate to a *conspiracy* occurred in fits and starts. On October 20, 1973, Richard Nixon fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox over the President's refusal to release the White House tapes. Mail flooded the Capitol demanding Nixon's impeachment. Nixon finally backed down by releasing the tapes and appointing a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski. But two tapes were missing and another had an eighteen minute gap. Then on March 2, 1974, seven former White House aides including Ehrlichman and Haldeman were indicted on twenty-four counts of conspiracy to obstruct justice. Nixon was named as an unindicted co-conspirator.

The media now treated Watergate in a purpose-act ratio. *Newsweek* highlighted "The Story of the Big Cover-Up," detailing the mystical cover-up as an important purpose of the administration.

> It began within hours after police discovered the original Watergate burglars crouched in the darkness of Democratic National Committee Headquarters—an arrogant cover-up plot elaborately conceived and persuaded by some of the highest officials in the nation. And it was still going on . . . the grand jury's 50-page true bill was the starkest description yet of the most massive government conspiracy in the U.S. history.[39]

The Watergate umbrella covered activities which grew out of the purpose of the White House in its acts of conspiracy.

Watergate escalated one more step. Stewart Alsop in May, 1973, in his article "War, Not Politics" had identified the step as *warfare*.

> They seem to have been motivated by more complex emotions—by a certain self-righteousness, by fear, by a special kind of political-ideological hatred. . . . They were not practicing politics. They were making war, a special kind of war. The kind of war they were making has been made

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[34] *Newsweek*, 18 Sept. 1972, p. 40.
[35] Ibid., p. 42.
[36] "Watergate: Chronology of a Crisis," *Congressional Quarterly* (Washington: 1974), p. 10.
[37] *Newsweek*, 30 Apr. 1973, p. 16.
[38] "And the Mess Goes On," *Newsweek*, 21 May 1973, p. 16.
[39] *Newsweek*, 11 Mar. 1974, p. 23.

between nations for a long time now, and it is still being made. But this special kind of war has not before been made within a nation, certainly not within this nation."[40]

Watergate was now domestic political warfare—the political act had become an end in itself. And in August, 1974, the nation discovered that President Nixon himself was the primary agent in the act. The June 23, 1972, tape showed that he said "they should call the FBI in and (unintelligible) don't go any further into the cases period."[41] The escalation was now over—the act was both the beginning and the end—an act-act ratio.

## NIXON, WATERGATE AND THE RHETORIC OF AGENT

David A. Ling

To define the rhetorical style of Richard M. Nixon as agent-oriented is to pronounce the obvious. Political commentators have noticed his use of the first person in the "I am the President" syndrome. Critics such as Gonchar and Hahn[42] found Nixon's tendency to agentify the Presidency so constant a strategy as to predict his rhetoric. There is ample evidence that Nixon used a style that viewed the world as controlled or controllable by agents. He viewed himself as the central and controlling agent in situations from the Vietnam War to the dedication of a shopping mall. This strategy is advantageous for claiming credit or accepting laureates. However, it can be a liability when trying to dodge responsibility for wrong-doing as in the Watergate Affair.

My purpose is to explore Nixon's reliance on a rhetoric of agent and how it hindered his attempts to separate himself from the wrong-doing of Watergate.

Nixon's first public address specifically directed to the issues of Watergate (May 1, 1973[43]) demonstrates Nixon's characteristic agent-oriented rhetoric. He began outlining actions that he had taken in response to various charges. The language is continuously in the first person:

"I immediately ordered an investigation. . . ."
"I repeatedly asked. . . ."
"I personally assumed responsibility. . . ."
"I directed that members. . . ."

His slowness in responding was because other trusted agents denied that White House staff were involved. When "new information" persuaded him that there might be validity to the charges, Nixon says he "personally" assumed responsibility for the inquiries and ordered investigators to "get all the facts." He is an agent attempting to control the scene.

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[40] *Newsweek*, 14 May 1973, p. 132.
[41] "White House Text of Nixon's Talks with Haldeman," *Detroit Free Press*, 6 Aug. 1974, p. 4A.
[42] Ruth M. Gonchar and Dan F. Hahn, "The Rhetorical Predictability of Richard M. Nixon," *Today's Speech*, 16 (Fall 1971), 3–11.
[43] *The New York Times*, 1 May 1972, p. 31.

In an attempt to purge his administration of "personal considerations," Nixon accepted the resignations of Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Dean. Dean's resignation is treated perfunctorally, for he may be one of the "other" agents who betrayed Nixon. With Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Nixon is unwilling or unable to imply that they might be involved in the wrong-doing. This would concede that he, the dominant agent in an agent-controlled universe, had erred in their selection. He leaves unquestionable his continued belief in Haldeman and Ehrlichman:

> Today, in one of the most difficult decisions of my Presidency, I accepted the resignations of two of my closest associates in the White House—Bob Haldeman, and John Ehrlichman—two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know.
>
> I want to stress that in accepting these resignations I mean to leave no implication whatever of personal wrong-doing on their part.

He does not complete the act of purging thus begun but continues to tie his fate to his two advisors.

When seeking an explanation for Watergate, a dramatic shift is apparent in Nixon's rhetorical strategy. He asserts his responsibility for what occurred: "In any organization the man at the top must bear the responsibility. That responsibility, therefore, belongs here in this office. I accept it." But his description of the situation is designed to exonerate him. He says he had always assumed personal direction of his campaign until 1972. The unprecedented demands of foreign and domestic policy were such that Nixon sought "to the maximum extent possible . . . to delegate campaign operations." Thus, scenic considerations became controlling, and campaigning had to be delegated to subordinates "whose zeal exceeded their judgment." Although Nixon asserts that to blame those to whom he entrusted responsibility "would be a cowardly thing to do," he does not trace blame to his own poor judgment, but the scenic demands.

This scenic shift is but a temporary lapse in Nixon's rhetorical style. The rest of his May 1st address is agent-dominated. He describes a series of important foreign policy issues facing the nation. The scene that is Watergate will not deter him from these important activities. "It is also essential that we not be so distracted by events such as this that we neglect the vital work before us, before this nation at a time of critical importance to America and the world." Here is an agent rising above a lesser scene to assume control of a far greater one.

His description of the Presidency is as an agency to be used by him for the promotion of good. He observes, "When I think of this office, of what it means, *I* think of all the things that *I want* to accomplish for this nation, of all the things *I* want to accomplish for you." Nixon concludes by asserting his belief that the remaining days of his administration can be "the best in America's history." It is clear that these will be the best days because of what he as agent/President does. "Tonight *I* ask for your prayers to help *me* in everything that *I* do throughout the days of *my* Presidency to be worthy of their [peoples of the world] hopes and of yours." (Emphasis added.)

Nixon's address reflects a continued reliance on agent-oriented rhetoric, while he gropes for a way out of Watergate. He continues to describe himself as an agent rising above the average and controlling the scene. As a result, while accepting responsibility for Watergate, he rejects any guilt for it. Guilt rests on those who betrayed him. His judgment is never at

issue. Consequently, no clear act of purification is possible. He begins an act of purification by purgation in the case of Haldeman and Ehrlichman but refuses to complete it. Again, Nixon's rhetorical shift in strategies is incomplete as he quickly returns to an agent-dominated world view.

In later addresses Nixon abandons agent orientation for scene and purpose oriented views of the world, but not until his resignation speech does he assume any personal responsibility for what had occurred. "I would say only that if some of my judgments were wrong—and some of them were wrong—they were made in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation."[44]

Nixon's traditional rhetorical style prevented him from extricating himself from the scandal. Perhaps an alternative rhetorical strategy undertaken at the outset of the affair might have better served him. One option was to make the scene the major force from the outset. However, this might have been too distinct a departure from his traditional style to have been believable. His partial attempt to undertake such a strategy was far from successful.

The rhetorical problem was his unwillingness to conclude that acts of an agent need not be consistently right. Here Burke provides a clue. Burke sees in the several actions of man an analogy to the concept of original sin.[45] Man as he interacts with man, will make errors in judgment for which he must undertake some act of purification before being redeemed. Such purification is achieved either through the act of mortification (self-sacrifice) or victimage (the use of a scapegoat).

Aside from resignation, Nixon was never able to develop an act of purification, reflecting his unwillingness to be seen as an agent who had erred. Nixon pictured himself as an agent who made tough decisions in the cause of righteousness that would maintain his place in history.[46] Admitting error in Watergate changes that image. The situation cried out for an act of contrition, an admission that he had erred in the choice of advisors, allowing others to act in his behalf betraying his trust. Such a personal acceptance of guilt would have necessitated a clearer act of purification. A complete break was required: some clear act of house-cleaning could rhetorically have created an act worthy of redemption.

It might have worked for the public viewed Nixon as a man hounded by the press and his enemies early in the scandal. A clear break with the scene could have intensified that feeling and perhaps created sufficient pressure to terminate the congressional inquiry. On the night Nixon resigned, Senator Ervin speculated that if only Nixon had admitted that he had made mistakes, he might have been spared his fate.

Perhaps such an option was not one Nixon could have accepted. Loyalty to subordinates, an inflated ego, or a passion for a place in history may have closed off this option. But what is clear is that the predictable rhetoric of agent that promoted Nixon's place in history limited his options in Watergate.

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[44] Richard M. Nixon, Presidential Resignation," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 50 (September 1974), 643–644.

[45] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (Los Altes: Hermes, 1954).

[46] Gonchar and Hahn, 5.

# RICHARD M. NIXON: THE FASCINATION WITH AGENCY

CHARLES U. LARSON

The first time I saw Richard M. Nixon in person was in 1958. He was leaving the White House by an obscure entrance. Even as a naive high school junior, I was struck by two things: first that he had been assigned a late model Mercury for his limousine, and second that he behaved so mechanistically as a Vice President *ought* to behave. This image of Nixon as a sort of backdoor branch of the family shuttled in and out for appearance but in awe and fascination of his office came to be a visual metaphor for Nixon's attitude toward agency, dramatizing his motivation. Nixon seems to have developed a fascination with what could be done with agencies, tools or mechanisms from his earliest uses of mass media in politics, e.g., the "Pumpkin Papers" and "Checkers". Garry Wills argues in *Nixon Agonistes* that Nixon was motivated by a series of important incidents in his life in which he was second best: with his father, football, and the near dumping from the GOP ticket in '52. This early fascination with agency for proving that he was not second best developed especially during his first term until finally he *became* the agency.[47] This emergence of agency as an umbrella term, occurred in four stages during Watergate—Agency and *Re-election* in Stage I; Agency and *Cover-up* in Stage II; Agency and *Watergate Defense* in Stage III; and Agency and *Resignation* in Stage IV. Thus *agency* became Nixon's "Key Term" during Watergate. As John Dean pointed out ". . . The only way to persuade the President was to not say something was improper, but that it was impractical."[48]

In early 1972 Nixon was an enormously successful President. Yes, people were slightly embarrassed at his attempts to agentify everything and to infuse his personality into the Presidency (e.g., seeing his accomplishments as monumentally historical or giving the Pope an autographed photo of the first family), he *had* reduced the war; the times *had* quieted during his tenure. He *had* reopened dialogue with Russia, and he *had* visited China. Even the economy was turning around and of course the opposition was in disarray—Muskie was weeping, Wallace talked busing, and Hubert was Hubert. The only real contender was George McGovern if he could be manipulated into the nomination. If he could be, Nixon might have the chance to win with the largest plurality in history; he would not be second-best behind LBJ. Enter agency and Richard's life-long ambition to prove himself.

### Stage I: Agency and Re-election

The best example of the shift from agent and the agentification is in the election slogans devised for 1968 and 1972: "Nixon's the One" and "Re-elect the President."

In order to control his own re-election landslide, Nixon devised an agency in order to circumvent another agency. CRP replaced the GOP National

[47] See "The Rhetorical Predictability of Richard M. Nixon" by Gonchar and Hahn for a fuller explanation of this personalization of the office of the President.

[48] *Playboy*, 22 (January 1975), p. 72.

Committee. This agency begat other agencies or tools—the use of damaging faked letters and other dirty tricks; the detailed intelligence gathering plans including the now famous Liddy plan; the mechanization of fund raising by a master technician, Maurice Stans, who was described as a "goddamn locomotive"; and perhaps as Woodward and Bernstein suggest, the ultimate dirty trick in the attempted assassination of George Wallace.[49] The staff of CRP were frequently technicians (e.g., Liddy, the intelligence gatherer; Hunt, the forger; and McCord, the "wire-man"). It is ironic that Stage I was brought to an end by one of the Agencies of CRP with the discovery of the Watergate burglers.

### Stage II: Agency and Cover-up

As the June 23 transcript now shows, almost immediately after the break-in was disrupted, the staffs of the CRP and the White House at Nixon's direction turned to agency to cover up. The CIA was instructed to tell the FBI to stay out to avoid turning up something on the Bay of Pigs. Then there was the continual use in the inner circle of the scenario—an agency to dry run communication strategies. It is interesting that Haldeman seemed unable to shake the compulsion with agency—when interrupted during testimony at his trial he responded, "May I please finish this *cycle*?" Behind the scenes there were numerous agencies or tools of covering-up: the offers of clemency, and the use of the secret Haldeman $400,000 to bribe. The various public acts of cover-up also smack of agency: the "Dean Investigation"; the later speech in which Nixon announced that he himself was going to investigate the "new information"; the resignation of his aides was a use of agency. The bust of Lincoln and the family photo were tools of the scene in accepting those resignations. Even the acceptance of a special prosecutor was seen as a tool to divert attention. Cox's office was used to draw fire by focusing on the Agnew scandal, apparently with prompting from the White House. And throughout the transcripts, one finds Nixon suggesting tools to abet the cover-up such as saying one "can't recall," or "stonewalling it," or perjuring oneself to save the master agency—The Plan—which itself was an agency to insulate the President from blame. All the "insulators" from McCord up to Ehrlichman were unaware of the involvement of higher ups. Again, ironically, agency disrupted the success of a phase: in this case there were the White House tapes and the face-off between Nixon and Cox's office over the tapes.

### Stage III: Agency and Defense

Almost immediately after the firestorm following the firing of Cox and the Richardson-Rucklehouse resignations, Nixon began to utilize new agencies to defend himself: Operation Candor; new formats for news conferences; the release of edited transcripts; selected leaks to discredit and bring most of the blame to bear on John Mitchell. The most striking emergence of agency was in the arguments used by Nixon through his lawyers to avoid release of the tapes. They are all arguments from agency: The agency of National Security will be threatened if the tapes are released; the agency of Presidential Confidentiality will be damaged and the Presidency itself as an agency needed to be protected from incursion. Nixon's

[49] In *All the President's Men* Woodward and Bernstein offer the hypothesis that Arthur Bremmer may have had connections in the Nixon camp, thus explaining the visit by Howard Hunt to Bremmer's Milwaukee apartment following the shooting.

fascination with how agency might be used became almost compulsive for we see him willingly sacrifice agents (Rose Mary Woods and members of his own family) in order to save his Presidency. Perhaps the classic agency argument devised during this stage was the invention of a "sinister force" which was responsible for the tape gap. It is again ironic that it was the intervention of another agency which signaled the end of the Nixon defense through the Supreme Court, an agency, ruling that the eight key tapes must be released.

### Stage IV: Agency and Resignation

In the tense pre-resignation days we wondered what agencies Nixon would now use. Would he use the emergency powers still available to him to declare martial law? Would he use nuclear threat to create a new crisis? (Recent reports of such a possibility have prompted proposal of a bill in the Senate limiting the power of the President to push single-handedly the nuclear war button.) Or would he simply follow the designated procedures for a Senate trial? Finally, Nixon refused to *agentify* the situation by admitting his own individual guilt in the matter. Instead he searched for an agency to allow him to *nunc dimitis*; he finally used the agency of a "lack of political base" to justify his resignation. At that point, perhaps, he returned to Nixon the agent, described by Gonchar and Hahn. This was hinted in his farewell to his staff with its metaphor of the man in the arena, and the encomium to his mother. In short, from an agent focus of the 1968—"Nixon's the One"—through a fascination and perhaps, a compulsion with agency, Richard Nixon returned to himself as agent—once again second best by most judgments of his contemporaries.

## RICHARD M. NIXON AND RHETORICAL PURPOSE

RUTH M. GONCHAR

There are two problems when a critic begins to analyze the Watergate rhetoric of Richard Nixon using rhetorical purpose as a perspective. First, how can the critic study purpose when he knows now that Nixon's Watergate rhetoric was repeatedly and consistently filled with untruths? Second, of what Nixon said during those years, how much did he *believe* to be true? Without an understanding of these two factors in Watergate, purpose is elusive; however, there are some clues as to Nixon's motives (purpose) in the communication which surrounded the issue for over two years. It is the thesis of this discussion that an examination of the interaction of purpose and agent can reveal political motives, specifically the political motives of President Richard M. Nixon.

The motive common to political men is power and to lesser degrees respect, wealth, and rectitude. The power motive divides into two classifications, the power-seekers and the power-holders, each with contrasting bundles of motives. The study of, say, a Franklin Delano Roosevelt would be the study of a power-holder, but since Richard Nixon saw himself throughout his life as a power-seeker, an analysis of Nixonian political purpose probably reflect the seeker.

Political purpose presupposes a knowledge of at least three disciplines: ideology, epistemology, and axiology. So the critic must study Nixon's ideological presuppositions, epistemological design, and axiological premises. But without an understanding of the man himself, even these disciplines are incomplete for the understanding of political motive.

Political purpose, the gaining of power, wealth, respect, reflects a political person—the agent. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a critic to know Nixon's drives, instincts, and states of mind. The rhetorical critic would use personality theory, psychohistory, and psychobiography at least. The critic would look into the man as revealed through his rhetoric—his personality orientation.

Because of various time and space limitations, and the enormity of the study just proposed, perhaps the most profitable path to follow is to determine the epistemological influences on political purpose seen in Nixon's rhetoric. A rhetorical critic begins his investigation on a political leader's epistemology by understanding the bases upon which he knows what he knows, specifically, his knowledge claims. One way of approaching knowledge claims is to evaluate the general premises from which a political leader confirms or refutes. For Richard Nixon these premises are of two kinds: predictions, and values.[50]

Nixon's Watergate defense indicates his belief that revealing the tapes would destroy the privacy and prerogatives of the Presidency. One can assume that the premise is supported by other examples in the past: Truman's decision, Jefferson's withholding of letters, among others. If this indeed is what Nixon based his argument on, then the following predictive knowledge claim can be identified: that the future should and will be like the past.

Values, the second general premise form identified in the Nixon rhetoric, refers to importance. "The certainty of a belief is not so much a matter of its intensity, but of the situation—of our expectations of its possible consequences."[51]

Nixon had to believe that concealing the White House tapes preserved the power of the Presidency. The importance of what was at stake was Nixon's value premise; maintaining that value was his political purpose.

Once the critic isolates knowledge claims, he can determine the leader's epistemological view of politics itself. For Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, the epistemological base of the game of politics was skill, not chance.[52] He trusted in his own political game-playing abilities, certain that success was built upon skill. Not so with Richard Nixon. David Ling argued that Nixon clung to a view of the world which pictured agents as controlling, and himself as the agent generally in control of the situation. Nixon's epistemological view of politics reveals quite another position. For him the basis of politics was luck. "'Circumstances, rather than a man's ambition,' 'destiny,' 'being in the right time and the right place,' 'fate,' 'good luck,'—these are the major determinants of whether or not individual action will have its effects."[53] Nixon repeatedly said, "Certainly, luck does play a part in

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[50] Forbes Hill, "Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War," unpublished essay, 1972.

[51] James David Barber, *The Presidential Character* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 75.

[52] Ibid., p. 378.

[53] Gary Wills, *Nixon Agonistes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 404.

success. The breaks can go either with you or against you. But you have to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities when they are presented."[54] Here was Nixon's real skill, his preparation to take advantage of luck. There is nearly a predestination in this. Nixon believed that he had been marked by fate. Luck came to many, but only pluck turned luck into advantage. Luck, fate, destiny, were all *out there* in Richard Nixon's world. Rather than choose what he wanted—Nixon did what he had to—he had to protect the tapes, he had to fire Cox. He was following the directions of those forces out there.

Sometimes out there was controlled by counter-agents: Cox, Ervin, and Sirica. But often out there was controlled by forces outside Nixon's hands. Who was to blame for Watergate? Not Nixon, although at times he accepted responsibility. Who, then? The rebels of the sixties. Even at the end, Nixon found no one to blame for his demise, except things.

The rhetorical critic might ask after identifying the political leader's view of politics "What does the political leader hold true, and how does he know it to be true?" Kennedy knew America's youth because he was of them. "I know America's youth,"[55] said Nixon, but how he knew them he did not say: from Julie and David? from Bud Wilkenson? from John Mitchell and J. Edgar Hoover? or from the bums who disagreed with everything for which Nixon stood? Here the critic can only speculate. But he can conclude that Nixon's patently limited resources contributed to the way he knew what he knew. Dan Rather in describing an incident he remembered with Lyndon Johnson, makes my point succinctly. At a luncheon:

> (Johnson) delved into a long reminiscence of how he had run the Presidency. He talked, among other things, about his desk in the Oval Office and the impressive display of phones he had stretching across it; how each phone had all kinds of buttons on it so that, on a moment's whim, he could send his voice crackling not only through the main arteries of government, but through its capillaries as well. Or, as he put it: "If I needed to get hold of somebody, all I had to do was mash a button. . . . And I mean anybody," he went on with emphasis. "Even some little fella tucked away in one of the agencies. If I thought he should have the answer to something, I'd just get him on the horn." . . . During a recent visit to Washington he had stopped by the Oval Office to pay his respects. The office had changed, of course—"As you'd expect," he quickly added—and a number of details had caught his eye. Among them, and one that especially seemed to intrigue him, was the President's desk: the size, for one thing ("it's a lot smaller than the one *I* had, you know"), and the compulsive neatness ("there was hardly a damn thing on it"). And finally there was the matter of the phone, the *one* phone. He could hardly believe it: "Just *one* dinky phone to keep in touch with his people." And on that phone there were three buttons. "That's all," he said, his voice rising to meet the point head-on. "Just three buttons, and *they all* go to Germans." (Haldeman, Erlichman and Kissinger).[56]

## CONCLUSION

We have been limited in many ways in this group analysis by space and availability of information. Nonetheless, this symposium does illuminate

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[54] Ibid. He reiterates this position several places in his own book, *Six Crises*.
[55] Ibid., p. 380.
[56] Dan Rather and Gary Paul Gates, *The Palace Guard* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 28–30.

the scandal and the possible motivation(s) of its prime character. Although one might argue that the discussion also demonstrates the human tendency to see what one wants to see, other explanations for the variety of interpretations are also plausible. Revelations in *The Final Days*[57] depict a Nixon in his last days wandering about the White House giving speeches to the portraits of past Presidents; ordering Kissinger to kneel in the Oval Office and pray with him, later collapsing in tears while lying on the rug; contemplating suicide openly. Our analyses have shown Richard Nixon progressively utilizing each term of the pentad. Perhaps an alternative explanation is that the Nixon of *The Final Days* is a persuader who has exhausted his potential resources of ambiguity: he is pentadically positionless—a situation which resembles insanity. The value of dramatistic criticism is not so much in its ability to guarantee a valid interpretation of a situation, as it is in its ability to prompt speculation. As Burke points out, ". . . the subject of motivation is a philosophic one, not ultimately to be solved in terms of empirical science."[58]

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[57] *Newsweek*, 10 April 1976.
[58] Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, p. xxv.